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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001598

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER IR IZ  
SUBJECT: MAY 23 I-ESC MEETING FOCUSES ON SADR CITY  
RECONSTRUCTION

Classified By: Economic Counselor Todd P. Schwartz. Reasons 1.4 (a) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Prime Minister Maliki chaired the May 23 meeting of the Iraq Executive Steering Committee (I-ESC) in support of Fardh Al Qanoon (FaQ), the Baghdad Security Plan. Maliki declared that Iraqi Security Forces in Sadr City "will never leave," and said a quick plan is now needed to demonstrate the GOI's commitment to meeting basic needs. He stated 100 million USD in emergency funds should be used for services and construction, but especially, to create jobs. Dire conditions persist in Sadr City and the GOI must still address damage to the electricity infrastructure and disruptions in the Public Distribution System (PDS). On May 26, the GOI will reopen the Al-Sarafiya Bridge, which a terrorist attack severely damaged in April 2007. The Council of Ministers reported limited progress on the refurbishment of 11 GOI buildings. End Summary.

MALIKI: "OUR FORCES WILL NEVER LEAVE SADR CITY"

¶2. (C) Declaring Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in Sadr City "will never leave," Prime Minister Maliki said a quick plan is now needed to demonstrate the GOI's commitment to meeting basic needs. Services are already increasing in Sadr City, he explained, in part due to Shia militia groups having denied the provision of GOI services for so long in this area.

MALIKI ORDERS NEW JOBS FOR SADR CITY RESIDENTS

¶3. (C) Maliki said the Sadr City Reconstruction Committee, led by Hak Al-Hakim and consisting of representatives of all of the Service Ministries, should direct its 100 million USD in emergency funds towards job creation, construction, and services. The funds should not go through the Baghdad Amanat or be put into a budget, he stressed. Stating, "Go out and give jobs," Maliki instructed Al-Hakim to seek out Sadr city residents "daily" and give them three month contracts. Al-Hakim said military operations are delaying the disbursement of the emergency funds, but he stands ready to hire 5,000 Sadr City residents and deploy 50 new garbage trucks to assist in the clean up. Al-Hakim highlighted the problem of population density and said the GOI needs to build 4,000 residential units outside of Sadr City to relieve such pressure. (Comment: Notably, representatives of the Amanat and the Provincial Council will not be participating directly in the Al-Hakim Committee. The Al-Hakim Committee is somewhat similar to the former Chalabi Services Committee in terms of participating members. However, Chalabi never had an independent budget, and served more as an Ombudsman for spot issues in all of Baghdad rather than a specific area like Sadr City. End Comment).

TOUGH CONDITIONS PERSIST

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¶ 14. (C) The Deputy Minister for Displaced Persons and Migration said conditions are still dire in Sadr City. Garbage is piling up, sewers are backed up, there is no electricity in many areas, and stagnant water compounds health risks, he said. Health clinics are not working, and while students are going to school, these buildings require extensive repair. The Deputy Minister also said his committee received 600 applications for compensation, but was still waiting for guidelines on procedures and awards. General Aboud, commander of the Baghdad Operations Center (BOC), shared his observation that streets are completely dark at night, due to lack of exterior lighting. He said this creates a significant security threat and asked Al-Hakim's committee to also address this issue.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION SAYS MOST SCHOOLS CLOSED  
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¶ 15. (C) A representative from the Ministry of Education (MOE) complained that many schools remain closed and lamented his ministry's lack of funds to restart refurbishment projects. He said the March and April fighting in Sadr City had "hit" many schools that the MOE had already began refurbishing, and complained the MOE budget lacked funds to restart such projects. Maliki suggested that the MOE apply for supplemental funds, but the representative said that he needed to refurbish the schools prior to the end of summer vacation.

SADR CITY PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM STILL AFFECTED

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¶ 16. (C) The Minister of Trade said the MOT needs 1,000 additional workers immediately to assist in distributing food rations and complained about closed roads in Sadr City. According to the MOT, it could only distribute 5,000 tons of its 6,000 ton obligation. Appealing to Hak Al Hakim in a bid to create jobs, the Minister stated, "1,000 men, however, can make the difference." The MOT complained that supply routes to PDS warehouses are still closed, a problem which the Minister of Defense argued is now solved.

DAMAGE TO ELECTRICITY INFRASTRUCTURE  
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¶ 17. (C) The Minister of Electricity reported significant damage to power lines, stations, and transformers in Sadr City. He said fighting had damaged 32 lines, and asked ISF to allow workers in to repair them. He also cited damage to the Jamila, Muthana, and Rosafa power stations, as well as 20 transformers. He added that in Basrah, fighting had destroyed 280 transformers.

AL-SARAFIYA BRIDGE TO REOPEN  
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¶ 18. (C) An engineer from the Ministry of Housing and Construction reported that on May 20 his team completed work on the Al-Sarafiya bridge, which an insurgent attack severely damaged in April 2007 (Comment: We expect the reopening of the bridge, which links the northern part of Baghdad over the Tigris river, to significantly alleviate traffic congestion and increase public confidence in the GOI, especially when the bridge's second lane is opened. The rebuilding of the Sarafiya bridge, completed on time, within budget and with almost no Coalition assistance, is a rare but welcome example of GoI capabilities. End Comment). The engineer said the bridge is now stronger than before and stated his team could duplicate these efforts on the Taji bridge. The MOHC and the PM's Office are planning a reopening ceremony for the bridge on May 26. Maliki called the bridge's reopening a "victory over terrorism."

GOI BUILDING REFURBISHMENT

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¶9. (C) The Secretary General of the Council of Ministers (COM) reported limited progress on the refurbishment of eleven GOI buildings, explaining that surveys and bid solicitations are ongoing. In response to a question from the MNF-I Deputy Commanding General, a Ministry of Finance representative said the GOI had not yet identified a suitable site for the Central Bank (CBI).

LESS ROLE FOR I-ESC SUPPORTING COMMITTEES?

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¶10. (C) Maliki praised the past accomplishments of the I-ESC Supporting Committees, but said that it is now time for the Ministries to increase their role. (Note: During the May 9 I-ESC, NSA Rubaie announced that the I-ESC would be narrowing its attendance. Judging by Maliki's comments, the future of the Deputy IESC Meeting and its Supporting Committees also seems to be in flux. Saeed Jabour, the IESC Secretary from the NSA Office, indicated that there is some discussion of moving the Supporting Committees to the auspices of the Provincial Council. Given that the PC is the natural home for coordination of service issues in Baghdad, this would have some positive benefits, but given difficulties in travelling to the Red Zone, it would reduce our ability to interact with the body. Jabour also told us last week that the PM has officially revoked the Executive Order of the Chalabi Services Committee. End Note).

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